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Report of the Economic and Social Council

Crime prevention and criminal justice

Letter dated 23 October 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the summary of the Seoul Anti-Corruption Symposium, held on 30 and 31 August 2001 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, co-hosted by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. The summary contains conclusions and recommendations of the Symposium.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 12, "Report of the Economic and Social Council" and 110, "Crime prevention and criminal justice".

(*Signed*) **Sun** Joun-yung
Permanent Representative

01-60487 (E) 301001

Annex to the letter dated 23 October 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

SEOUL ANTI-CORRUPTION SYMPOSIUM 2001

Executive Summary

(2 October 2001)

From 30 to 31 August 2001, the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs co-hosted the *Seoul Anti-Corruption Symposium 2001* which was attended by representatives from international organizations (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Asian Development Bank, and Transparency International) as well as representatives of countries from the various regions of the world. It was organized by the Seoul Institute for Transparency and supported by the Asia Foundation.

The main objective of the Symposium was to assist major urban centers to increase transparency in their public administrations and thus reduce corruption through sharing the experience of Seoul, in particular its Online Procedures ENhancement for civil application (OPEN) system. This web-based system allows citizens to monitor corruption-prone applications for permits or approvals and to raise questions in the event any irregularities are detected. At the same time, the Symposium enabled participants to share their own experiences and practices on various anti-corruption measures that have been successful or not so successful. It is hoped that this exchange of experiences will assist participants to gain a new perspective on anti-corruption measures that might be effective in their respective cities and/or countries.

The Symposium participants adopted important Conclusions and Recommendations, as follows:

Recalling the Joint Statement of Cooperation between the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Seoul Metropolitan Government,

Reaffirming the importance of transparency, accountability and responsiveness in public administration, particularly in promoting ethics and preventing corruption in local, state and central administrations,

Recognizing the advances in e-government that allow for more efficient, real-time, citizen-centered delivery of services,

Bearing in mind that innovations in these areas should be effectively integrated into an administrative framework, and

Stressing the importance of the role of political leadership in demonstrating commitment for clean and transparent governments;

The participants of the Seoul Anti-Corruption Symposium 2001 in their capacity as experts in local, state and central administration, public sector ethics, and anti-corruption policies:

Recognize Seoul's OPEN System as a useful example for parties interested in improving the transparency and accountability of their administrations and suggest the distribution of the manual, Mechanism to Increase Transparency in Administration: OPEN System of Seoul, by the United Nations and the Seoul Metropolitan Government,

Recommend that the United Nations and Seoul Metropolitan Government continue to provide technical cooperation in the spirit of the aforementioned UN-Seoul Joint Statement, including

promoting bilateral technical cooperation, upon request from those parties interested in introducing or improving e-government measures not only to combat corruption and promote ethics but also to generally upgrade public services to citizens, using information technology to the betterment of humankind,

Suggest that the organizers of the Seoul Anti-Corruption Symposium 2001 and other interested parties consider a follow-up meeting in the near future, two or three years hence, to monitor the progress of technical cooperation in introducing or improving administrative measures such as the Seoul OPEN system, and

Also suggest that the Korean authorities take steps to bring the Conclusions and Recommendations of this Symposium to the attention of the 56th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in the context of its forthcoming discussion on the subject of Public Administration and Development.

Summary of Proceedings

Background

Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, has led the development of its country as its center of politics, economy, education and culture. As such, it has fostered a rapid economic growth of the country. However, like many metropolitan cities, it faces the problem of corruption, which accompanies such rapid growth.

Recognizing that the issue of corruption is not only one of good will or ethical behavior on the part of an individual official but also one of creating an administrative system that effectively eliminates the causes of corruption and prevents wrongdoing, the Municipality adopted a systematic approach to combat corruption. This approach simultaneously pursues four major lines of action, namely, preventive measures, punitive measures, ensuring transparency in administration, and enhanced public-private partnership. One of the initiatives taken by the City of Seoul to combat corruption is the Online Procedures ENhancement for civil application, which is known as the OPEN system. The OPEN system was developed to achieve transparency in the city's administration by preventing unnecessary delays or unjust handling of civil affairs on the part of the civil servants. This web-based system allows citizens to monitor corruption-prone applications for permits or approvals and to raise questions in the event any irregularities are detected.

In May 2001, the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs signed a *Joint Statement of Cooperation* to work together to introduce the OPEN system to the Member States of the United Nations as a good practice. As outlined in the *Joint Statement*, the two organizations co-hosted the *Seoul Anti-Corruption Symposium 2001* from 30 to 31 August 2001. The Symposium was organized by the Seoul Institute for Transparency and supported by the Asia Foundation. It was well attended by representatives from international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Asian Development Bank and Transparency International as well as from countries from the various regions of the world. During the two-day meeting, the participants experienced directly the features of the OPEN system and reviewed a draft manual on how to operate it. The manual, to be jointly produced, will be available in the six official languages of the United Nations to its Member States.

The main objective of the Symposium was to assist major urban centers to increase transparency in their public administrations and thus reduce corruption through sharing the experience of Seoul, in particular its OPEN system. At the same time, the Symposium enabled participants to share their own experiences and practices on various anti-corruption measures that have been successful or not so successful. It is hoped that this exchange of experiences will assist participants to gain a new perspective on anti-corruption measures that might be effective in their respective cities and/or countries.

In view of the *Conclusions and Recommendations* adopted, the participants and organizers have embarked on the achievement of these goals. This document shows that the participants reaffirmed the importance of transparency, accountability and responsiveness in public administration; recognized the advances in e-government and the need to effectively integrate innovations into an administrative framework; and stressed the importance of political leadership in demonstrating a commitment to clean government. They recognized the Seoul OPEN System as a useful tool for parties interested in improving the transparency and accountability of their administrations and suggested the distribution of a manual on the System, in preparation by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the United Nations. They recommended continued technical cooperation by the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the United Nations and the promotion of bilateral technical cooperation for interested parties. They also recommended that a follow-up meeting be considered within two or three years. Finally, they suggested that the Korean authorities bring the findings of the Symposium to the attention of the 56th Session of the General Assembly.

A final report of the Symposium, containing a summary of the discussions and background papers, will be issued. The organizing framework of the report is the Symposium programme. The summary of the discussions, reported by Session, follows below.

Session I: Corruption and Development

This opening session was devoted to an exploration of the link between corruption and development. Four presentations were made by participants representing the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), New York University, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Korean Association for Corruption Studies. No discussions were scheduled.

The first presentation by OECD shared some experiences and lessons gained through efforts in fostering good public governance, promoting good governance in the corporate world, and fighting bribery in business transactions. In addition, the importance of taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was highlighted.

The next presentation, *The Electronic Government, Transparency and Performance Management in the Public Sector*, was made by Professor Dennis Smith of New York University. He argued that for the full fruits of e-government and transparency to be realized they must be combined with another innovation, which is performance management. While e-government, transparency, and outcome measurement and management all have something to contribute to the good governance of cities, together they can be a truly powerful form of "managing for results."

The Asian Development Bank's presentation looked at the role of Multilateral Development Institutions (MDIs) in combating corruption through supporting and promoting the principles of good governance. The three roles of MDIs were pointed out: increasing awareness of corruption

and its impact on society, ensuring that controlling corruption is relevant to its member countries and setting an example of good governance to the public.

Finally, Professor Young-Jong Kim of Sungsil University made the presentation, *Anti-Corruption System in Korea: Toward Integrated Strategies for Local Governments*. He brought up the issue of corruption in the Korean context and made various suggestions on strategies for local governments to control corruption. Also, the importance of establishing an integrated strategy of both the local and national levels for an effective fight against corruption was emphasized.

Session II: Transparency Mechanism of Seoul Metropolitan Government - the OPEN System

The presentation made by the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) followed the evolution of the Seoul OPEN system by explaining its background and situating it among the other anti-corruption initiatives introduced by SMG. Like many other rapidly developing urban centers, the City of Seoul experienced a need to tackle its corruption problem. The SMG was once described as a "pandemonium," due to local officials abusing their discretionary power, particularly when granting various permits and licenses. To remedy the situation, the SMG adopted a systematic approach to eradicate corruption: preventive measures, punitive measures, increased transparency in administration, and enhanced public-private partnership.

First, radical deregulation was carried out, abolishing and revising 80% of regulations that were unduly confining. Furthermore, to prevent illicit ties with business, the long-standing practice of assigning jurisdiction over a specific area to one individual was abolished, and officials are regularly rotated. Second, city officials are punished for every act of wrongdoing. To ensure the implementation of the principle of 'zero tolerance' for corruption, Seoul City has introduced various reporting measures, including e-mail, hotlines, and direct report card to the Mayor. Third, the Online Procedures ENhancement for Civil Applications was introduced. This system allows the public to monitor the process of their applications through the Internet. Open records of all stages of an administrative procedure eliminate the need for personal contact with a particular official. It does away with the so-called "express fees". Since the OPEN system began operation in April 1999, the transparency and integrity of the Seoul Metropolitan Government by Seoul has greatly improved, according to the feedback received from Seoul residents. Finally, there is an Anti-Corruption Index. Through this index, the Seoul administration evaluates the level of integrity of each administrative unit and makes the result public on an annual basis. The City administration actively involves citizens in its various anti-corruption activities.

In the following discussion, the panelists raised some key points. An observation was made that Seoul's anti-corruption initiatives, and the OPEN system in particular, seem to be working in those sectors or services where the jurisdiction is at the city level. The question of their effectiveness arises where the jurisdiction is shared with other regional or central governments, in the absence of a similar system on their part. So the issue of the introduction of similar or complementary systems in other jurisdictions was raised. Another panelist brought up the issue of how to increase the usage of the reporting mechanisms by the public to report corrupt acts and the need for methodologies for accurately measuring the efficacy of these and other anti-corruption measures of the SMG. Finally, the need to sustain the momentum of these anti-corruption initiatives, even in the face of a change of government, through non-partisan support was stressed.

Session III: Effective Ways to Combat Corruption in Municipal Governments

Session III aimed to distil some lessons on effective ways to combat corruption, in general, and at the municipal level, in particular. Three presentations were made by: 1) the United Nations on its role, 2) the Asia Foundation on the role of businesses, and 3) Transparency International-Korea on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The United Nations made a presentation that corruption can be seen as one symptom of poor administration and mismanagement. Through this optic, corruption is primarily due to a structural problem of institutional weaknesses that can be overcome by strengthening institutional capacities and training citizens of their rights. The role of the United Nations is to facilitate the exchange of experiences and practices among national and sub-national governments and other interested stakeholders in the private sector and civil society and promote mutual cooperation.

The presentation by the Asia Foundation focused on the importance of involving businesses in counter corruption efforts, since they are both perpetrators and victims of corrupt acts. Because corruption increases the cost of doing business for everyone and shuts out some groups from certain lines of business altogether, there is a strong incentive for the business community to become involved in counter corruption activities. The example of the involvement of the Makati Business Club in the Philippines in a program called *Transparent Accountable Governance* was highlighted to illustrate the active engagement of one business organization.

TI-Korea made a presentation which highlighted how NGOs can be involved in non-adversarial, cooperative partnerships with governments in anti-corruption initiatives. In addition to their traditional watchdog role, NGOs can also suggest new policy measures, such as those suggested by TI-Korea to the Korean public sector: integrity pacts, the people ombudsperson network, research to monitor the progress of anti-corruption measures, etc. The participation of NGOs is crucial to increase the transparency of local administration. At the same time, the NGOs themselves need to organize suitable participation structures to facilitate public involvement.

During the panel discussion that followed, the observation was made that until now, policy makers have been more focused on *what* to do rather than on *how* to reduce corruption. The panelists proposed that successful anti-corruption efforts need to sequence activities, such as prioritizing among even United Nations' anti-corruption resolutions for implementation. Next, attention was also drawn to the need for NGO independence. If NGOs receive their funds primarily from their governments, their role in Integrity Pacts, in appointing Ombudsmen such as those introduced by the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG), etc. may be limited. Another point was made that if corruption is seen as a problem of costs and benefits, it is better to reduce opportunities for corruption rather than detecting or punishing it. For example, the OPEN system has many technical benefits. However, its economic benefits are less clear. An impact study after several years may be highly useful. The success of the OPEN system is due to the highly desirable characteristics of individuals -- the incumbent Mayor and his staff. However, the long-term success of any anti-corruption policy rests not on individuals but also on a good governance system.

Special Session: The Role of Information Technologies in Transparency, Service Delivery and Citizen-Centered Administration in Metropolitan Governments

During this special session, four case studies of incorporating information technologies in public administration were presented. The Swedish Agency for Public Management described the

Kontact-N system, a simplified registration process of business enterprises via the Internet. The City of Vancouver's use of information technologies, ranging from web pages to electronic local maps, was described in the second presentation. The third presentation by the Korean Ministry of Planning and Budget gave an overview of the various information technology initiatives introduced in Korea and the legislative and institutional framework they required. The final presentation also looked at the case of the City of Seoul in using information technology to improve the performance and participation in its administration.

The participants' discussion focused on the latest developments in e-government and citizen-centered administration. The new ICTs are thought to be a powerful tool in bringing administrations and their citizens 'on-line'. Government-citizen relations cover a broad spectrum of interactions at each stage of the policy-making cycle: from policy design, through implementation to evaluation. There are one-way relationships in which the government produces and delivers information for use by citizens. There are two-way relationships in which citizens provide feedback to the government. There are also relationships based on a partnership with the government in which citizens actively engage in the policy-making process.

The main questions discussed were as follows: How can ICTs be applied and utilized in public administration? What role is expected of active citizens participating in e-governance? What are the beneficial or harmful influences of ICTs on governance? All participants recognized the merits of the operation, performance, and effectiveness of the cases presented. But they raised questions such as: How can these systems be easily adopted? How much do they cost and how much time is required in establishing them? And what are the priorities in introducing these systems?

The session concluded that e-governance can utilize active citizen participation and ICTs can be useful for good governance. The concrete requirements identified are strategically establishing a social infrastructure, providing proper legal system for new ICTs environment, simplifying administrative processes and business process re-engineering, strengthening the citizen-government partnership based on active citizen participation, consciousness-raising for citizen and public officials, and enforcing on-line and off-line measures simultaneously.

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Fifty-sixth session
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Agenda item 119 (c)
Human rights questions: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Letter dated 5 November 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a memorandum concerning the situation of human rights in Myanmar (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 119 (c).

(*Signed*) Kyaw Tint **Swe**
Permanent Representative

01-62181 (E) 081101

Annex to the letter dated 5 November 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Memorandum on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

I. Introduction

At its fifty-fifth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 55/112 of 4 December 2000, entitled "Situation of human rights in Myanmar". Typical of country-specific human rights resolutions, it contains many allegations that were based on information received from anti-government groups inside and outside the country as well as on the report of the previous Special Rapporteur, Judge Rajooma Lalah of the Commission on Human Rights. Being a report prepared from selective and dubious sources, it was most biased and derogatory. As a result, the resolution, based on such a report with an intent to pressure the country into making rapid political changes, became unrealistic, highly selective and subjective. Most allegations are based on half-truths and in many cases on pure fabrication that no one can verify with authority and certainty. Myanmar had no choice but to reject all the unfounded allegations contained therein.

Pursuant to resolution 55/112, the current session will continue its consideration of the situation of human rights in Myanmar. This memorandum provides information for use as a basis in this consideration. For all practical purposes, the information provided in the memorandum focuses on areas addressed in the resolution and where positive changes have taken place.

II. Political situation

The emergence of a peaceful, prosperous and functioning democracy is the ultimate objective of the Myanmar Government. Accordingly, the country is in the process of an evolution to a multiparty democracy with every effort being made to lay firm foundations in order to build the essential and necessary groundworks required to become a functioning democracy based on a sound economy while maintaining and further promoting its hard-won peace and stability like many other democracies in the world today.

At the same time, the Government has been able to successfully bring in 98 per cent of the armed groups, in making peace accords and in joining hands with the Government in the rebuilding of a new Myanmar since 1989. The Government of Myanmar is working together with various United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and interested foreign Governments in creating necessary conditions to bring these former armed insurgent groups into the mainstream, transforming them into responsible citizens of the country and cooperating with them also to eliminate opium production in Myanmar, which has been in existence in the country and the region for more than a century.

Until recently one of the 10 political parties that exist in the country, the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, unfortunately had pursued a policy which was detrimental to the interests of a nation going through a challenging period in the process of an evolution towards democracy. This is where many new

democracies fail to achieve their objective when going through a similar process, tragically resulting in chaos, anarchism and even ending up having civil wars.

Myanmar, in 1988, went through months of riots, looting, social anarchy and even mob executions before safety was restored. It was an experience no one in Myanmar wants to go through again. The Government of the Union of Myanmar, therefore, takes the issue of political instability very seriously as it moves towards its goal of a stable and multiparty democracy.

The political climate in the country has distinctly improved since the beginning of the dialogue between the Government and the NLD party. Confidence and understanding between the two sides has been promoted and cooperation, rather than confrontation, began to materialize. As a consequence, those NLD members detained in order to maintain peace and tranquillity were released and are still being released. The requests for Chairman U Aung Shwe and U Tin Oo of NLD to limit their movements were also lifted. The result of the ongoing talks between the Government and the NLD party has also led to the following developments:

(a) Governmental cooperation in the reopening of the NLD party branch offices in various townships in the country;

(b) Governmental support and cooperation being provided to NLD and nine other legally existing political parties in carrying out their party activities in the framework of the existing laws of the country;

(c) Government being able to promote better understanding with the NLD leadership while safeguarding its national interest of maintaining peace, stability and national unity which the nation is at present enjoying for the first time in its modern history since its achievement of independence in 1948.

The ongoing political process between the Government and the NLD party is steadily gaining momentum. The positive developments taking place at present is an indication showing that the process is on the right track. The Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Mr. Razili, also highlighted this point after his recent visit to Myanmar in August 2001, which was reflected in the press release by the Secretary-General as "both sides are committed to the process".

However, there are those, both inside and outside Myanmar, who are demanding immediate changes. They believe that a country can transform itself into a functioning democracy overnight. They believe that just holding an election solves a country's problem. They believe that slowing Myanmar's economic development through various measures and pressures will expedite the transition to democracy. But history compels us to be more realistic. New democracies do not automatically succeed. In fact, many fail. They fail when they are built on fragile foundations and unrealistic expectations but they thrive when they are built on a solid economic base, when there is a constitution suited to the culture and needs of the country, when societies are stable and when national security is assured.

The transition of Myanmar to democracy is very complex, as its experience with democracy in the past has demonstrated. In fact, its post-war democratic system was unable to survive the political, ethnic and social pressures and had to be abandoned in 1962 to avoid the break-up of the country. Therefore, Myanmar must act realistically and responsibly in laying the foundations of a democratic system that is suited to its culture and national security and that will last for many years.

If Myanmar loses the basic peace and stability it has achieved, the groundwork for democracy may be lost. The Government then would fail in its primary responsibility, which is to protect its citizens from harm and to maintain national security.

The Government of Myanmar warmly appreciates the interests, concerns and opinions of its partners in the international community. The support and understanding of countries which have gone through experiences similar to those of Myanmar has helped the country move forward. As the country's stability and prosperity grows, economic opportunity will grow and its political system will be able to develop. This is the goal of Myanmar and the understanding, support and patience of the international community in achieving that goal would be appreciated by all people of Myanmar.

III. Full cooperation with the relevant United Nations mechanisms

A. Cooperation with the Special Rapporteur

Myanmar has consistently cooperated with the United Nations throughout its membership, except for the visit of Justice Rajooma Lalah of the Commission on Human Rights to Myanmar. However, in 2001, the Government of Myanmar accepted the visit of Special Rapporteur Professor Pinheiro, who visited Myanmar from 3 to 5 April 2001. During the visit, the Government of the Union of Myanmar extended every assistance to the Special Rapporteur to facilitate his visit, complying with all of his specific requests. This has all been formally acknowledged in his interim report. Despite his short visit, the Special Rapporteur could meet with many political personalities, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of the NLD party.

In October 2001, the Special Rapporteur visited Myanmar for the second time. The Government made detailed arrangements to facilitate his request for meetings as well as for trips to areas of his particular interest. Although the visit was originally scheduled to last 12 days, he had to shorten the visit by 2 days owing to a problem with his health. He was able to meet with a wide range of individuals and organizations, including governmental officials, the leadership of various political parties, including the NLD party, leaders of ethnic groups and international civil society organizations. The Special Rapporteur expressed his appreciation for the full cooperation that he received from the Government of the Union of Myanmar.

It is hoped that the extensive itinerary of the Special Rapporteur has given him a wider and realistic perception of the country. Furthermore, his visits to some Asian countries, such as Japan, Malaysia and Thailand, and discussions with governmental officials, civil societies and members of the legislative bodies of those countries prior to his visit to Myanmar, have, it is hoped, given him more opportunity to obtain a better perspective of the situation of the Union of Myanmar. Based on the balanced methodology, the report that he has produced and the conclusions that he has reached should certainly serve as a sound basis for the consideration of the Myanmar situation.

B. Continued cooperation with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General

The Government of the Union of Myanmar has continued its cooperation with the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Ambassador Razali Ismail. Since his appointment as Special Envoy, Mr. Razali has visited Myanmar five times, his most recent visit taking place in August 2001. During his frequent visits, Mr. Razali met with a wide range of individuals and organizations, including governmental officials, the leadership of various political parties, including leaders of ethnic groups, international civil society organizations and the business community. His reports and official pronouncements should also receive the due emphatic mention that they deserve in drafting the resolution on Myanmar.

C. Cooperation with the International Labour Organization

Despite the adoption of a resolution on Myanmar at the 88th session of the International Labour Conference, which the Myanmar delegation considered unfair and unjustified, Myanmar resumed cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to seek a solution on the issue. As a result, the ILO delegation visited Myanmar from 17 to 19 May 2001 to discuss with the Myanmar side the terms of reference for the visit of a high-level team from ILO to carry out an objective assessment of the practical implementation of and actual impact of the framework of legislative, executive and administrative measures adopted by the Government. The high-level team of ILO, led by the former Governor-General of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephan, and consisting of the former Labour Secretary of the Philippines, Nieves Roldan-Confesor as deputy leader, the former Chief Justice of Sri Lanka, Kulatilaka Ranasinghe, and Judge of the European Court of Human Rights and former Assistant Foreign Secretary of Poland, Jerzy Makarczyk, as members, paid a three-week visit to the country in September/October 2001. The Government of the Union of Myanmar extended full cooperation to the team in arranging requested meetings and fact-finding trips to various parts of the country identified by the high-level team. The team was given unfettered freedom to carry out its assessment and provided with unlimited access, even in far-flung border areas.

IV. Initiative on human rights

In April 2000, the Government of the Union of Myanmar established a 20-member Human Rights Committee, with the Minister for Home Affairs as Chairman. As part of this initiative, the Government has conducted a series of human rights workshops with the cooperation and assistance of the Australian Government. The public officials from the most relevant ministries and bodies, such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, including personnel of the police force, the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, and representatives of local non-governmental organizations participated in the workshops. As a result of these workshops, the Government has been able to educate a vast pool of human resources at the national level in the field of human rights.

V. Efforts to upgrade the health status of the country

The Government is committed to strengthening the country's health system in order to meet the needs of the people. It is making every attempt with its available resources to ensure equitable access to primary health services, even in the remote areas. The health sector is the fourth largest recipient of funding from the governmental budget after the agricultural, construction and educational sectors. In 1988 the Government's health expenditure was kyats 436 million. It has increased to kyats 43,559 million since then. Developments in health infrastructure can be seen by the addition of 97 hospitals, 65 rural health centres and 20 urban health centres, while 74 existing hospitals were also upgraded.

The Government is firmly committed to fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS and is addressing the issue as a matter of priority. HIV/AIDS has been designated as a disease of national concern. A high-level multisectoral National AIDS Committee, chaired by the Minister for Health, was formed in 1989 to oversee the national AIDS programme in Myanmar. The National Health Committee, the highest policy-making body, provides policy guidance and necessary assistance to enhance HIV/AIDS prevention and control activities in the country.

Despite very limited international assistance, Myanmar has adopted a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention and control programme. In early 2001, the national AIDS programme and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS drafted a joint plan of action for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in the country. It is a comprehensive plan, covering all aspects: education, prevention, cure and rehabilitation. Since its implementation will require considerable financial resources, Myanmar is mobilizing local and international agencies for the needed resources. In this regard, the European Union has very recently expressed its intention to make contributions to the activities identified in the joint plan of action. This certainly will bring the level of funding for the HIV/AIDS campaign in Myanmar closer to that made available to its neighbouring countries.

VI. National efforts for the promotion of the educational sector

The Government has consistently given priority to the educational sector since its assumption of State responsibilities. As a matter of priority, the Government concentrated on the building of educational infrastructure to create equal opportunity for children to fulfil the right to education. This has achieved concrete results. A total of 4,488 primary schools, 416 middle schools, 230 high schools and 125 colleges and universities have been newly established since 1988. The expenditure for the educational sector is progressively increasing, representing the third largest in the national budget. The Government's expenditure of kyats 8,559 million in 1998-1999 financial year increased to kyats 28,170 million in the 2000-2001 financial year. At present, all university courses and schools remain open. The Government is also making every effort to facilitate an uninterrupted pursuit of education throughout the country. Although there had been some adjustments in the length of the academic year, the Government ensured that those adjustments did not affect the quality of education and that the established curricula were completed. Now the academic year has been brought back to its normal length.

VII. Economic situation

The efforts of the Government in the economic sector are aimed at achieving the ultimate objective of bringing about a high standard of living for the more than 51 million people of Myanmar, in line with the social objectives of the Government. The Government inherited a rapidly deteriorating economy in 1988, with a very low foreign exchange reserve. The political turmoil in that year left in its wake a completely devastated country in material terms. The civil administration structure was in complete disarray. Compounding the problems, developed countries and multilateral financial institutions have denied the country access to official development assistance, loans and grants since 1989. Unilateral sanctions were applied and investments were denied. Travel to the country was discouraged so as to choke tourism, which was a promising source of foreign exchange. This situation left very little room for the Government to revitalize the country's economy. In spite of these restraints, the economy has performed satisfactorily over the past 10 years. In the biennium 1999-2000, gross domestic product grew by 10.9 per cent. The sustained economic growth over the recent years contributed to a better quality of life for the majority of the population. While criticism of the Government for various social ills of the country continues, the Government has been able to make perceptible progress in its efforts for the all-round development of the country. The fact that, since 1999, Myanmar has been upgraded from the category of countries enjoying low development to the medium human development category in the human development index of the United Nations Development Programme reflects this progress.

VIII. Conclusion

In the past year, with the improving political climate in the country, the Government of the Union of Myanmar has been able to take a series of positive steps. However, as a country undergoing a very complex transitional process, many challenges remain. All of the positive developments mentioned above are a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to overcoming all of the challenges in a systematic and incremental manner. These developments, as well as the interim report of the current Special Rapporteur, should be duly taken into consideration.